PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract

Teacher education and professionalism are believed to be key to school reform in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2014). As a part of the school reform initiatives, Kazakhstan has been actively investing into teachers' in-service professional development, teachers' social support and school infrastructure. Interestingly, however, pre-service teacher education has not been part of those reform initiatives (Yakavets et al., 2017). Whilst teacher professionalism has been actively discussed at the in-service level, there is little to no research on it at the pre-service level. As such, this study aims at exploring future teachers' professional identity i.e. what factors can influence the development of teachers' professional identity at the pre-service level. A case study was conducted to explore Year 4 (graduating year) students' experiences in one pedagogical university in Kazakhstan. The study outcomes indicate a link between pre-service-teachers' professional identity, quality of students' professional experiences and their emotions. The development professional identity is viewed as highly emotional process, wherein pedagogical universities must integrate self-reflection and emotional awareness in their academic programmes.

Key words: professional identity; teacher education; teacher shortage; higher education; school reform in Kazakhstan

ҚАЗАҚСТАНДА КЕЛЕШЕК МҰҒАЛІМДЕРДІҢ КӘСІБИ БІРЕГЕЙЛІГІ

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Аңдатпа. Қазақстан мектептеріндегі реформалардың тиімді іске асуының алғышарты - мұғалімдердің білімі мен кәсібилігі болып саналады (OECD, 2014). Аталмыш реформалардың аясында, Қазақстан мұғалімдердің біліктілігін арттыруға, мұғалімдерді әлеуметтік қолдауға және мектеп инфрақұрылымын белсенді түрде дамытуға инвестициялар салуда. Дегенмен, педагогикалық кадрлар дайындау орта білім беру саласындағы реформалардан тысқары қалып қойды (Yakavets et al., 2017). Мектеп деңгейіндегі реформалар аясында мұғалімнің кәсіби шеберлігі мен біліктілігі белсенді түрде талқыланғанымен, педагогикалық университеттер аясында келешек мұғалімдер кәсіби тұлғасының қалай қалыптасатындығы жөнінде жасалған зерттеулер жоқтың қасы. Осылайша, аталмыш зерттеу келешек мұғалімдердің кәсіби тұлғасын, яғни, мұғалімдер кәсіби тұлғасының дамуына қандай факторлар әсер ететіндігін зерттеуге бағытталған. Қазақстандағы бір педагогикалық университетте 4-ші (бітіруші) курс студенттерінің тәжірибесін зерттеу мақсатында кейс-стади әдісі қолданылды. Зерттеу аясында келешек мұғалімдердің кәсіби тұлғасы, кәсіби практикалардың сапасы мен олардың эмоционалдық ахуалдары арасында байланыстың бар екендігі анықталды. Кәсіби сәйкестікті дамыту жоғары эмоционалды процесс ретінде қарастырылады, оның шеңберінде педагогикалық университеттер өздерінің академиялық бағдарламаларына өзіндік рефлексия мен эмоционалды хабардарлықты біріктіруі керек.

Түйін сөздер: кәсіби тұлға; педагогикалық кадрлар дайындау; мұғалімдер жетіспеушілігі; жоғары білім; Қазақстандағы орта білім саласындағы реформалар

ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНАЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ БУДУЩИХ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

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Аннотация. Педагогическое образование и профессионализм учителей считаются ключевыми факторами, ведущими к преобразованиям и реформе в школах Казахстана (OECD, 2014). В рамках реформ среднего образования Казахстан активно инвестирует в повышение квалификации учителей, социальную поддержку учителей и развитие инфраструктуры в школе. Интересно, однако, что педагогическое образование не было частью данных национальных реформ (Yakavets et al., 2017). В то время как профессионализм учителей активно обсуждается на уровне среднего образования Казахстана, исследования на тему формирования профессионализма учителей на уровне подготовки педагогических кадров в вузах практически не проводилось. Таким образом, данное исследование направлено на изучение профессиональной идентичности будущих учителей, то есть, какие факторы могут влиять на формирование их профессиональной идентичности. В рамках данного исследования был использован подход кейс-стади, были собраны данные и изучен опыт студентов 4-го (выпускного) курса одного из педагогических университетов Казахстана. Результаты исследования указывают на связь между формированием профессиональной идентичности будущих учителей, качеством профессиональной практики и эмоциями студентов. Развитие профессиональной идентичности рассматривается как высокоэмоциональный процесс, в рамках которого педагогические университеты должны интегрировать саморефлексию и эмоциональное осознание в свои академические программы.

Ключевые слова: профессиональная идентичность; педагогическое образование; нехватка учителей; высшее образование; школьная реформа в Казахстане

Introduction

Professional identity is a way teachers understand and construct their experiences within their professional communities and hence, it contains teachers' values, beliefs, and attributes (Sachs, 2003; Hong, 2010). Teachers' professional identity underpins their decisions and actions in classroom (Pajares, 1992; Hong, 2010). There is a growing understanding that teachers' professional identity is a key to teachers' classroom practices, motivation, and retention (Moore & Hofman, 1988; Gaziel, 1995; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2006). Hong (2010) highlights the importance of pre-service teacher education in addressing teacher shortages and retention in schools. Teacher shortage has been identified as one of the key problems globally (UNESCO, 2016). The global demand for teachers is driven by factors such as the growth of the school-age population and increasing student - teacher ratio in each classroom in the world. The most common factors that influence teacher shortage are entry into the profession (recruiting), retention in the profession, and teacher burnout (UNESCO, 2016, p. 10). Number of studies in different countries have shown that burnout, low self-efficacy, well-being are the key reasons for teacher drop out (Chan, 2002; Johnson et al., 2005; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Teacher shortage is one of the key challenges in schools in Kazakhstan too. In 2022, due to the rapid growth of birth rate, there was a shortage of 1906 teachers in Kazakhstan: Almaty region - 571, Atyrau - 651, Mangystau - 212, Turkestan - 472 (MES RK, 2021). Teacher recruitment is also considered as a reason for teacher shortage in Kazakhstan. The percentage of students, who plan to become a teacher after graduation, is also declining significantly in Kazakhstan (MES RK, 2021). In general, attracting the best graduates to a teaching profession has become a global problem (Klassen et al., 2021; Edwards, 2021). Thereby, building better understanding about pre-service teachers' professional identity can help to develop recommendations and address

teacher recruitment and retention problems in Kazakhstan and beyond. Hence, the purpose of this study is to (a) explore factors that influence pre-service teachers' professional identity; and (b) discuss implications for improvement of pre-service teacher education in Kazakhstan.

Teacher education in Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan the educational system is highly centralised and bureaucratic (OECD, 2018). There are currently 7,440 schools in Kazakhstan with over 3 million students and about 360,000 teachers (Statistical Committee of the Ministry of Education, 2021). The average age of a Kazakh teacher is 41 years old, the average work experience is 17 years (OECD, 2019), and more than 90% of teachers in Kazakhstan have a bachelor's degree or its equivalent (OECD, 2019). Approximately 3% of new professionals join the teaching staff each year (IAC, 2017). The training of teaching staff in Kazakhstan is carried out in 55 higher educational institutions and 5 of them are specialized pedagogical universities that focus only on teacher training (MES RK, 2021).

Pre-service teacher education models vary depending on educational context. There are, however, two key approaches including, but not limited to (a) *concurrent model*, when where future teachers simultaneously get subject knowledge, psychological-pedagogical, and practical training, and (b) *consecutive models,* when teacher education includes a three-year bachelor's degree followed by a one - or two - year master's degree, leading to a graduate diploma or master's degree in education (Sharplin et al., 2020). The Kazakhstani pre-service teacher education in Kazakhstan follows a concurrent model and consist of the following: (1) initial fundamental pedagogical education is provided at pedagogical colleges (tertiary education), (2) institutes or universities (bachelor's degree) and (3) postgraduate level. According to the statistics only 2% of teachers in schools have a master's degree (OECD, 2019, p.6).

In 2019, Kazakhstan introduced the 'Law on Teachers Status', which determines the status of teachers, establishes their rights, and ensures social packages, prevents them be involved in any extra activities outside their duties and responsibilities (Law on Teachers Status, 2019). The Law also guarantees a gradual increase (25% each year) teachers' salary between 2019 and 2024. Moreover, in order to prevent further increase in teacher shortage, the government significantly increased the state scholarships (grants) as well as the number of monthly stipends for pedagogical specialties (https://primeminister.kz/).

Despite all these investments, there are key challenges that pre-service teacher education system still needs to address in Kazakhstan: (a) teacher recruitment and retention; (2) updating the academic programmes. First, teacher recruitment and retention are key problems in Kazakhstan. National TALIS data show that only about a third of young teachers (under 30) plan to remain in the profession until retirement, while just over one third would like to leave the education sector entirely (IAC, 2019). In the upcoming years, 55% of students of pedagogical specialties and 25% of early career teachers may leave profession (Irsaliyev, 2019). The reason for these is believed to be the lack of support, poor mentorship system and hard adaptation (NCPD "Orleu", 2022). Second, pre-service teacher education system is failing to keep up with reforms in schools in Kazakhstan (Yakavets et al., 2017; Sharplin et al., 2020). Particularly, the updated curriculum was introduced as a part of school reform initiatives, which included more skills-focused approach in teaching and learning; a school assessment; updated textbooks; and new approaches in in-service teacher training system, including collaborative learning and project-based approach (Yakavets et al., 2022). Despite growing autonomy, pedagogical universities are believed to fall behind these changes, wherein academic programmes in universities address only 7% of the updated curriculum (Sharplin et al., 2020). As such, exploring future teachers' professional identity could help us develop recommendations on teacher recruitment/retention and strengthening the link between university-school programmes in future.

Conceptual framework: pre-service teachers' professional identity

Professional identity is a way teachers interpret their professional selves, experiences, and attitudes, which are usually influenced by external factors as well as teachers' own values and beliefs (Sachs, 2005). A teacher's sense of professional and personal identity, as well as emotions, are an integral part of a teacher's personality. Teachers' professional identity is formed through social and psychological interactions between *teachers' personalities* (emotions, values, etc.) and their *context* (situational requirements) (Hong et al., 2010). Interestingly, however, Zembylas (2003) highlight that external factors are more in play when it comes to the development of professional identity, wherein a teacher's identity is formed through power relations that exist in "social interactions, speeches, and day-to-day negotiations within the school culture" (p. 109). According to Skerritt (2019) teacher's professional identity develops in the process of socialisation, and external professional standards have a great influence. Professional identity is a dynamic process and, is subject to constant construction and deconstruction (Zembylas, 2003, Skerritt, 2019). In the following sub-headings, we explore *external* factors that can influence pre-service teachers' construct of their future professional identity.

Educational factors

Initial teacher education plays an important role in the development of professional identity: (1) it sets a knowledge base in a specific subject area and, (2) it develops character such as autonomy and responsibility (Hoyle & John, 1995; Sexton, 2007; Miles & Knipe, 2018). According to Smith (2020), initial teacher education lays and nurtures the seeds of professionalism and develops skills for life-long learning. Beauchamp & Thomas (2006) argue that the role of the teacher education curriculum can be seen as crucial to influencing future teachers' professional identity.

The key challenge with initial teacher education around the globe, however, is that it is overly theoretical and does not convey the practical skills required for learning (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). Unlike medical students who learn precise surgical techniques during their training, it is believed that future teachers do not acquire the necessary skills at the pre-service level and hence, need to be retrained in school, shifting the burden of teacher training from higher education to schools (Greenberg et al., 2013). Roberts-Hull et al. (2015) call this the "lack of evidence content" problem (p. 6). Initial teacher education programmes emphasise subjects rather than teaching and do not cultivate a positive professional identity. As a result, students do not develop a sense of vocation by the time they graduate (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2007).

The studies conducted in Ireland showed that teachers consider theoretical knowledge that they acquired during university training irrelevant to their daily work in school (Sexton, 2007). Flores (2014) report similar results in Portugal, where there was a gap between the theory taught in the early stages of teacher training and its application in practice. In a phenomenological study of 20 teachers in high school, Nahal (2010) reported that theoretical courses taught during the initial teacher training were not related to classroom teaching in school. As in-service teachers, they found it difficult to put their theoretical knowledge into practice. In other words, future teachers are taught theories without applying them to reality, which affected their emotional state. The transition from university to on-the-job teaching can be frustrating and traumatic for the early career teachers (Huberman, 1993; Vonk, 1995; Green et al., 2018). However, it is a critical stage in the development of a teacher's professional identity and has a lasting effect on teachers' effectiveness, job satisfaction, and their career path (Hebert & Worthy, 2001).

Thereby, early induction into profession can be an important element of developing a positive professional identity at the pre-service teacher education level. The problem with the teaching

profession is that practical knowledge is not codified (Shulman, 1998). Tasdemir (2020) found that one of the main ways to improve the effectiveness of initial teacher education is to facilitate a link between theory and practice. Professional internship can play a key factor in the formation of professional identity of future teachers, wherein they become confident that they can and should teach (Teleshaliyev, 2013). The studies highlight the impact of professional internships in forming a professional identity and at early-career stage (see Flores, 2005).

A positive induction and mentorship programmes can play an important role in shaping professional identity of future teachers. Irsaliyev (2019) highlights that strengthening mentorship programmes for young professionals is important in retaining future teachers in the profession. The aim of a mentor is to build trust and support system for future teachers, thus facilitating their development, wherein teacher mentors can pass on their experience and shape professional identity of beginning teachers (Tillman, 2000; Teleshaliyev, 2013). A well-designed mentorship programmes can improve future teachers' relationships with peers, self-efficacy, and learning skills (Darling-Hammond, 2002). A positive induction into career can build future teachers' self-efficacy and beliefs (Bandura, 1989, 1997).

Social factors

The school environment, students, colleagues, and school administration can be of great importance in shaping professional identity of both a student and a novice teacher (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2006). In Shamatov's (2006) study, the emphasis is on the fact that in the post-Soviet space, local culture and traditions play an important role in shaping the relationship of new teachers with other colleagues. Novice teachers respect their administrators, colleagues, students' parents, and officials and are therefore more accommodating in their interactions.

The influence of parents, teachers, partners, colleagues, and others on the choice of profession is also one of the dominant factors influencing the choice of the profession of a future teacher. Daniel and Farrell (1991) note that parents have the greatest influence on children's choice of their profession. Moreover, studies show that educators play a significant role over a choice of applicants to pursue a teaching profession (Lortie 1986).

Professional identity is formed through interaction with others and within a professional community - it is a relational phenomenon (Beijaard et al., 2000; Korthagen et al., 2001). The support system is necessary for both the student and the novice teachers. The creation of professional communities and environments in the university is one of the important prerequisites for the development of professional identity of future teachers, their values and culture (Berezina, 2008).

Economic factors

The economic factors, such as renumeration and work conditions, have the highest impact on teacher recruitment and retention in Kazakhstan and beyond (Sharplin et al., 2020). The key factors for early - career teachers' drop out include teachers' workload, reform intensity, toxic school culture, burnout and so on (Smithers & Robinson, 2003; Luekens et al, 2004). Teacher status and societal recognition of the profession is important for the development of future teachers' professional identity in Central Asia (Shamatov, 2006; Teleshaliyev, 2013). During the Soviet period, teachers had a special moral and political role in the society (Zajda, 1980). Many teachers in Kazakhstan still refer to Soviet education as being of high quality in contrast to the current educational practices (Fimyar, 2014; Fimyar & Kurakbayev, 2016). Teachers' nostalgia about the past could be related to the deterioration of the quality of education and status of the teaching profession after the collapse of the Soviet system. Kazakhstan has been actively investing in updating school curriculum, assessment, and teachers' in-service professional development. In 2019, the 'Law on

Teachers' Status' were accepted, which guaranteed a gradual increase of teachers' salary (online.zakon.kz). By 2025, the government aims to invest 2,4 trillion tenge into updating school infrastructure. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MSHE) is increasing the amount of the state scholarships to recruit more students to teaching profession. Such a systemic support is expected to have a positive effect on teachers' social status as well as attract most talented students to the teaching profession. As such, researching pre-service teachers' professional identity through educational, social, and economic prisms can help build better understanding and create stronger support system for future teachers' induction into profession (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998).

Research methodology

Design of study

The case study approach was adopted to elucidate the phenomenon of pre-service teachers' professional identity (Yin, 2003). The case of one pedagogical university was explored around the following two research questions:

(b) What factors can influence pre-service teachers' professional identity?

(c) What are key implications for pre-service teacher education improvement in Kazakhstan?

There were 15 graduating year students' different subject areas (mathematics, physics, biology, Kazakh, Russian and foreign languages), who agreed to share their perceptions of professional identity.

The case description

The study was conducted in one of the pedagogical universities in Kazakhstan. Throughout its history the university trained more 70 thousand teachers for urban and rural schools in Kazakhstan. At the time of writing, more that 2000 students were planning to graduate the university, wherein 800 students were majoring in teaching. 72% of students are reported to be from a socially vulnerable background. The university had more than 80 academic programmes covering all levels of education from college to PhD degrees.

Data source

First, research participants were asked to write a self-reflective short essay on 'Who am I?'. Participates were given time reflect ton their personal and professional selves. The data allowed to explore students' beliefs, values, motivations, and plans for future. Second, semi-structured focus groups and individual interviews were used to collect abundant and detailed responses to research questions (Kvale, 2005). Focus group interviews allowed obtaining detailed, comprehensive information from several respondents at the same time. In addition, the responses given in a group discussion illustrated students' shared experiences and emotions. Group members supported, complemented, and stimulated each other to share their experiences and perceptions openly during interviews. Focus groups also allowed research participants to feel more comfortable and confident. Individual interviews enabled us to decompose some aspects of research participants' perceptions and obtain more detailed explanations of issues that were raised during focus groups. The interviews were held both at university and outside of it to provide privacy to research participants. The average length of each interview ranges from 50 to 130 minutes.

Data analysis

Thematic and open-ended coding were used to decipher data based on research questions and issues that research participants raised during interviews (Westhues et al., 2008). Coding made it

possible to systematise the data for more convenient interpretation and analysis. Both interviews and students' reflections were transcribed and coded. We first coded text units in accordance with the research questions. The next step was to select parts of texts expressing similar thoughts as units of textual analysis (Kambatyrova, 2020).

Ethical considerations

Prior to data collection, in accordance with the University guidelines on ethics, the approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee. All research participants were provided consent forms, which included research aims and expected outcomes. Research participants were also informed about their rights to withdraw from research any time. The anonymity of research participants as well as confidentiality of data collected were also carefully thought through, wherein research participants details were coded and folders with research data were partword protected on first author's computer (Sagintayeva, 2022).

Results and discussion

The professional self

The study outcomes indicate that pre-service teachers' highlight a *love for children* as a key element of their professional selves. Students' report that the *calling* to become a teacher or a sense of *vocation* has evolved over a period of time, as they had not clear-cut plan to become a teacher initially:

[…] the choice of profession was difficult for me. I did not understand where to go, but I knew that I was good at building relationships with people. My parents advised me to become a psychologist, but after weighing everything (pros and cons), I decided to become a teacher. Do you think I regret it? No! I enjoy working with children, although there are always difficulties during the learning process (*Participant 1, Reflective essay*).

[…] my calling is to learn and become a teacher. I would like to justify my decision. First, this is my desire to explain things to people, especially children […]. Second, I get moral pleasure through helping others to learn the world […]. Third, I respect my teachers. In future, I also want to be as attentive and patient with students as my teachers (*Participant 2, Reflective essay*).

There are students, who note the importance of government's support and view teaching profession as a means for social lift:

[…] in general, in recent years I can praise our government, because teachers' status is increasing in our country. The financial support for both pre-service and in-service teachers is improving […]. Of course, I can't say that it's fashionable or good, but we are on the right track *(Participant 3, Interview).*

[…] I am from a rural area, and a large family. I had to get a state grant *(Participant 4, Interview).*

Having said that, love for children and working with children became a key motivator, much stronger than the state support for many interviewees, who note that they acted of their own free will in choosing a teaching profession. Even those who joined pedagogy because of the *availability of state grants*, recognized the fact that love for children is the strongest motivator in sustaining their passion for teaching:

Well, the main motivation are children, whom you teach, when they smile every time you enter the classroom and, when you see that they are glad to see you, you immediately have a desire to give them some interesting materials, make your teaching engaging, there is a motivation to come up with something new *(Participant 5, Interview).*

Attracting highly motivated and talented students into a teaching profession is seen as a key to improving the quality of teacher education in Kazakhstan (OECD, 2015). However, the admission to teaching profession can be mainly based on the results of the Unified National Test (UNT), which does not allow students' motivation or their psychological readiness to become teachers. Given the increase of state grants provided for teacher education, the pedagogical universities need to strengthen the admission process and hence, become more selective (OECD, 2014).

The research participants emphasize the role of professional internship (or practicum) in the development of their professional identity. Through classroom observations and successful application of knowledge into practice, they were able to build a better understanding of their subject area, increase self-confidence and positive attitude to the profession. Students noted both positive and negative experience during professional internship:

During the practicum, I liked the fact that I was able to increase students' motivation to learn. I came up with different games. I had fifth and seventh grade students, so I had to use different methods and games *(Participant 5, Interview)*.

I kind of found my own teaching style and I really liked it actually. Children quickly learned the programme that I taught to them *(Participant 6, Interview)*.

This is in line with the previous studies on the importance of closing the gap between initial teacher education (hereinafter, ITE) and school practice in Kazakhstan, wherein future ITE is criticised for not equipping future teachers with practical skills that are necessary for solving day-to-day problems that can arise in a classroom setting (Sharplin et al., 2020; Courtney et al., 2020).

The social self

The participants also describe their first teaching experience as full of uncertainty and loneliness. They note that *support from mentors and supervisors* was important in ensuring a positive induction into profession. In order to overcome a self-doubt, students note that it was very important to get support from their university - based supervisors and school-based mentors. Unfortunately, many respondent felt unhappy about the quality support provided during their practicum:

I would want to get more feedback from our school-based mentors. If there were any shortcomings, so that she would give comments, I would like her to give advice, and not just listen and go. At the end of our practicum, our mentor came to one of my lessons, but she was silent. I would prefer her to at least say goodbye properly, but all we got was an ignorance *(Participant 7, Interview)*.

At some point, our supervisions were more like begging for attention […], which I felt was very rude *(Participant 8, Interview)*.

Teacher-students expect feedback from their supervisors and mentors. If this does not happen, students can become disillusioned. Providing feedback and mentoring are crucial for quality teacher education, as future teachers must address different kinds of teaching and learning related problems (Brown, 2006; Loughran & Berry, 2005). In general, mentorship is an important element of teacher retention (Breux & Wong, 2003). Namyssova (2021) notes that mentoring is especially important for novice teachers at the beginning of their career, as it enables to build positive professional identity, understand the notion of professionalism in practice and perceive themselves as professional teachers. Only professionals with a solid knowledge base are able to make decisions independently, act responsibly and ethically as well as overcome difficult challenges in their day-to-day practice (Furlong et al., 2000).

There is, however, a need for capacity building, so that faculty members could revisit their beliefs and attitudes to teaching and learning in pedagogical universities in Kazakhstan (Sharplin et al., 2020). Irsaliyev (2019) notes that 23.7% of teachers believe that they have not received sufficient training to teach in schools in Kazakhstan. Thereby, Dziova (2011) reports that 60% of future teachers' study time is devoted to special subject training, which can indicate a simplified view of the

teacher's activity, aiming it at the training of highly specialized specialists of a certain qualification in the professional training of teachers in pedagogical universities in Kazakhstan. Zembylas (2003) also argues that "the construction of the teacher's professional identity is a complicated process and dependens on their agency" (p. 214). Currently, it is reported that teacher education system in Kazakhstan requires improvement in terms of quality and efficiency, as specialisations are too narrow and hence, limit the flexibility of teachers in labour market. There is a need to provide more autonomy to universities in development of academic programmes (OECD, 2014).

The emotional self

The research outcome suggests that becoming a teacher is a highly emotional experience, in which student-teachers may experience both negative and positive emotions almost equally (Malderez et al., 2007). Having negative experiences is inevitable. Brown (2006) says that student-teachers should be always ready to acknowledge and address their emotions:

[…] when I came to school, I was sure that I would not succeed. I was so afraid, but when I saw the children, they began to smile [...], they began to ask different questions, I just let go my fears and started talking with them freely. I treated them with with all my heart and soul and felt similar treatment from them. When it was a time to say goodbye, we cried so much. It was just such a love *(Participant 7, Interview).*

The student-teachers' fear of failure before starting teaching practice soon changed when they felt supported by their students and began to identify themselves as "real" teachers. Thus, pre-service teachers' professional identity evolves through overcoming feelings of uncertainty and fear, which is an inalienable part of their professional practice (Poulou, 2007). Beyond their own emotional turmoil, student-teachers note the importance of being able to build an emotional connection with their students, which takes time and skills:

[…] And the downside is that they seem to perceive us as equals. Therefore, at first it was difficult to find a common language. As time passed, and I got to know the class, it was able to establish a common language with my students *(Participant 8, Interview).*

The kids all trusted me. In addition to being a teacher, I think, I was their psychologist, because they told me their personal secrets and trusted me. I gave them my advice. I liked it. I do not regret becoming a teacher *(Participant 9, Interview).*

Pre-service teachers' positive emotions (e.g. joy and pride) mostly come from their students i.e. engage actively in lesson or friendly attitude. Godefroy (1992) believes that motivations and emotions do not have a sharp distinction between themselves and reflect different shades of the same process. At the same time, emotions arise because of strong motivations. Thus, initial teacher education must equip future teachers with practice-based skills, emotional intelligence, and self-awareness, which are key components of pre-service teachers' professional identity (Korphagen, 2004). Enabling future teachers to reflect on their emotions and enhance their self-awareness should become part of core academic programmes (Hong, 2010).

Conclusion

The case of one pedagogical university was used to explore factors that influence the pre-service teachers' professional identity and make implications for initial teacher education in Kazakhstan. It became evident that the development pre-service teachers' identity is subject to both external and internal factors. Our study confirms that future teachers' internal values and beliefs are at play when it comes to sustaining their willingness to remain in the profession. The professional

internship or practicum, when student-teachers interact with children has a huge influence on the development of their professional identity. Thereby, providing proper mentorship support and supervision are important, as it may affect pre-service teachers' perception of their professional experience. The development professional identity is viewed as highly emotional process, wherein pedagogical universities must integrate self-reflection and emotional awareness in their academic programmes. In general, building better understanding about pre-service teachers' professional identity is vital for improving teacher recruitment and retention in developing contexts, including Kazakhstan.

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